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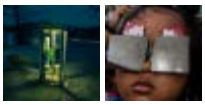

'THE ONLY THING I WOULD IMPOSE IS FRAGMENTATION' – AN INTERVIEW WITH NICK LAND

June 19, 2017 · by Michael JΔmes · in Badiou, Ireland, Land. ·

'The Only Thing I Would Impose is Fragmentation'

Interview with Nick Land

by Marko Bauer and Andrej Tomažin

In your 2014 book **Templexity: Disordered Loops through Shanghai Time** *you write: '"What happened to America?" is the Cyberpunk question par excellence'. What really happened to America in the last few months?*

It's sort of stolen from William Gibson, so it goes right back to the mid-1980s. I think you're totally right to say that now is an excellent time to return to it. So what happened to America? If I was gonna say it in a nutshell: after roughly half a millennium during which the main driving force of global history has been to achieve the integration of larger and more powerful states, directed by a group of strongly universalist ideologists that basically think that the larger your aggregation and the larger the set of common rules that can be imposed on them, the better, we're seeing a tidal reversal of truly historic scope. The basic tendency now is disintegrative. So what I see happening to America: holding itself together is going to become increasingly challenging.

We're in advance sorry for referencing French theorists, which are, of course, part of your

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formation, but to which it seems you're also increasingly allergic to.

That requires no apologies whatsoever.

One of the most valuable tendencies of your writing is/was the deterritorializing of the progressive/reactionary divide. This seems especially lost on your blog Xenosystems, where you position yourself on the Right, regardless of how far on the outside of it that is. Isn't this a kind of reterritorialization?

I think we are overdue—always—for a big discussion about what people mean by Left and Right. The Left/Right polarity is a very interesting piece of language, a little compact system of language, because everyone's using it with either an immense lack of clarity about what is really being invoked by that, or with greatly inconsistent basic associations with those terms.

The Left for you is now the conservative side, and the Right the progressive one. But where does the Left/Right distinction reside, actually? Does the Left stand for—as Badiou and co. would claim—egalitarianism, and the Right is against that? Is the Left the Golden Rule and the Right the rule of something along the lines 'do whatever pleases you, but accept the consequences'?

Well, that's the Crowleyite sense of the Right. Badiou is an interesting person to introduce, because I am kind of happy with his Left/Right distinction. In a sense that is now in play predominantly, the Left is the camp of unity and universalism, and egalitarianism is a big part of that. The Right is the camp of fragmentation, experimentation and, I'd say, competition as a term that is inherited from a tradition and is probably fairly uncontroversial. But yes, people do attach themselves to a sense of the Right and, no doubt, also of the Left that is exactly about hyperterritorialization. There is a Blood and Soil sense of the essence of the Right, which I feel compelled to engage with and try to displace or dethrone, because I don't think it leads anywhere. It's a dead end. There might be some tactical opportunities in those tendencies, but the 'Neo' in NRx implies precisely that there is no going back.

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In so far as Blood and Soil identitarianism will manage to attain power in various ways, it will see its worst days, it will be forced to deliver and perform, and will fail to do so. The more they are actually in a position to implement policy, the more they will become ineffective in their own terms. They will lose the potential for mass globalization and be associated with failure. I would like to see those experiments happen on a small enough scale that they can be educational, rather than globally catastrophic.

You're interested in local failures?

Yes, local failures are great. Global failures, obviously, not so great.

All the '30s analogies are kind of lethargic or nostalgic, as though there was nothing new going on. Nevertheless, there's also Badiou's passion for the Real and the phenomenon of 'communists' turning into 'fascists' during the period between the two world wars—figures such as Pierre Drieu la Rochelle or Charles Péguy, who is perhaps even more ambivalent, since he becomes a vector of reference for both Vichy France and Mussolini, but also of the resistance movement. We are aware of your different take on what fascism is, which sees no transformation in the above cases, and from the perspective of which Goebbels's move from socialism to national socialism is a mere stroll. We are, however, interested in your move to the other —outer—side. What could a relation between passion for the Real and passion for the Outside be? Is your Outside similar to Badiou's Real?

It might be. I would say, though, that without a notion of reality testing, an invocation of the Real is of absolutely zero significance. Anyone can invoke the Real, but unless there's some mechanism that provides, not a voice for the Outside, but an actual functional intervention from the Outside, so it has a selective function, then the language is empty. In that sense it's completely inseparable from fragmentation. The modernist systems work—whether you're talking about the market economy or the natural sciences—because they are fragmentary systems. There's no political decision about what is or is not a good scientific or

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economic result. These results are subject to a selective sorting process that mobilizes the Outside. That's where, without being a great or even a mediocre Badiou scholar, my natural suspicion about an invocation of the Outside from the position that he seems to occupy would be.

A silly metaphysical question: Is the Outside something given/fixed or is it a changeable entity?

It's an important, but not perfectly formulated question. The tendency of transcendental philosophy has been to increasingly identify the Real with Time. The Real and Temporality are deeply co-involved in such a way that Time cannot be used as a framework in which to place or make sense of the Real. We simply can't ask the question of whether the Real is changeable or unchangeable. If we say the Real is either changeable or unchangeable, we are saying that it exists in Time, and if that's the case, then we should be asking about Time and not what we thought we were asking about, when we were asking about the Real. Because it is the Real that is the ultimate controlling factor. To think that we can place It in Time is a distraction from this ultimate transcendental level of the question. That's intrinsically obscure, but I think also inescapable.

How does reality testing function?

We do that by enabling a process of selection to happen. The natural sciences are as good an example of this as any. The only thing that makes the modern sciences elevated beyond epistemic procedures seen in other times and other cultures is the fact that there is a mechanism beyond human political manipulation for the elimination of defective theories. Karl Popper is on that level just totally right. If it's politically negotiable, it's useless, it's unscientific by definition. You don't trust scientists, you don't trust scientific theories, you don't trust scientific institutions in so far as they have integrity, what you trust is the disintegrated zone of criticism and the criteria for criticism and evaluation in terms of repeated experiments, in terms of the heuristics that are built up to decide whether a particular theory has been defeated and

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eliminated by a superior theory. It's that mechanism of selection that is the only thing that makes science important and makes it a system of reality testing. And this is obviously intrinsically directed against any kind of organic political community aiming to internally determine—through its own processes—the negotiation of the nature of reality. Reality has to be an external disruptive critical factor.

CCRU's text Lemurian Time War *says that hyperstition is 'charting a flight from destiny'. How does this notion come into play with reality testing?*

I think hyperstition is one of those things that has completely escaped from the box and is now a wild, feral animal on the loose. My relation to this alien thing is like everyone else's who's interested in it. I am approaching it from a position of zero authority, trying to make sense of how it is living and changing and affecting the world. It, the thing, not it, the concept. But having said that, my sense of a hyperstition is that a hyperstition is an experiment. It makes itself real, if it works. And whether or not it works, is something that can't be, again, decided by a process of an internal debate, you can't as a result of some kind of internal dialectics decide that, hey, this is a good hyperstition, it has a great future. It's gonna work because of its intrinsic relation to the Outside, which is something that cannot be managed. Perhaps it can be cautiously, tentatively predicted in a way that a scientist or an artist would—through learning their craft—get a sense of what is gonna work and what isn't gonna work. But that's not the same as having a criterion, still less a law.

Let's return to our first question on America in this very historic moment, which is folded in with semiotic patterns and intensive regularities that seem to be tweeted and spread in a certain post-factual discourse into an image of the real, which one retroactively cannot distinguish from the real anymore. Is fabrication of fake news in Veles, Macedonia, during the US elections, a way to 'propagate escape routes' as you see it, or is it an ephemeral event with no significance?

I would definitely think some sort of a dismissive

response along the second line would be grossly complacent. Is it an escape route? There’s definitely a relation to escape. This whole fake news phenomenon is hugely important and historically significant. At the moment I’m completely captivated by the strength of an analogy between the Gutenberg era and the internet era, this rhythmic force coming out of the connection between them. Radical reality destruction went on with the emergence of printing press. In Europe this self-propelling process began, and the consensus system of reality description, the attribution of authorities, criteria for any kind of philosophical or ontological statements, were all thrown into chaos. Massive processes of disorder followed that were eventually kind of settled in this new framework, which had to acknowledge a greater degree of pluralism than had previously existed. I think we’re in the same kind of early stage of a process of absolute shattering ontological chaos that has come from the fact that the epistemological authorities have been blasted apart by the internet. Whether it’s the university system, the media, financial authorities, the publishing industry, all the basic gatekeepers and crediting agencies and systems that have maintained the epistemological hierarchies of the modern world are just coming to pieces at a speed that no one had imagined was possible. The near-term, near-future consequences are bound to be messy and unpredictable and perhaps inevitably horrible in various ways. It is a threshold phenomenon. The notion that there is a return to the previous regime of ontological stabilization seems utterly deluded. There’s an escape that’s strictly analogous to the way in which modernity escaped the ancien régime.

At the beginning of the internet there was a notion of it being inherently democratic. In the 00s, namely in the time of The Arab Spring, bloggers and others, who were using the internet, were seen as the ones who would spread democracy around the world. From your perspective this expectation probably seems utterly ridiculous.

It’s this weird hybrid: recognizing quite realistically the massive insurgent potential of new media, but

then applying that to these dying ideological formations. It’s like if someone had said, in the Gutenberg era the printing press is an amazing, powerful device and it’s going to spread Catholic orthodoxy all over the world. It’s half right and half insane. The neoconservative mentality, associated with these new communication technologies, is exactly the same hybrid of a glint of realism mixed with a healthy dose of utter psychosis.

Reza Negarestani somewhere writes that mere ‘collectivity is not enough for a work [or an event] to be hyperstitional.’ He elaborates this through a difference between Tolkien and Lovecraft. What kind of collectivities are we looking at here, if not the ones attached to universalism?

I am not 100 percent confident of what Reza is saying in that text. I wouldn’t want this to be treated as a commentary on his thought. But hyperstition did arise in a certain milieu that definitely rhetorically emphasized a certain type of collectivity and even more than that. What’s being referenced is not primarily universality at all, but something much closer to an anonymity or the problematization of attribution. Any hyperstitional unit—and what’s now called a meme is very close to this—that can be confidently attributed to a particular act of individual creation is originally disabled. H.P. Lovecraft seems to have understood that the whole production of the Lovecraftian mythos was very much an attempt on his part to subtract his own creative role. It’s only when that is subtracted that these things are released. Cthulhu becomes a kind of hyperstitional term to the point that it’s not simply something that has been invented by Lovecraft. The fact that he weirdly, often a bit hamfistedly, weaved his social network of friends, namely their names, into his stories, is part of that recognition. What’s more at stake in this notion of collectivity is something like a breakage of attribution, the original subversion of it. I don’t think it’s just a tactic. It’s precisely the things where you have no idea where they came from, it’s exactly those elements about whose genesis you have least confidence, that are the ones that have the greatest hyperstitional momentum.

To turn to the period between the two world wars once more, your many noms de plume remind us of Fernando Pessoa’s heteronyms. One of them was a futurist, another a royalist, several of them occultists and neopaganists. With you it goes even further, it was first thought that Reza Negarestani is one of your monikers. The same goes for Jehu, a twitter Marxian (@Damn_Jehu) that certainly finds a lot of understanding for your positions. It’s as though heteronyms were a force against univocity, it seems crucial to keep them differentiated.

Pessoa is someone people keep telling me, always really persuasively, to look at, but I’m afraid I just haven’t yet had a chance to do that. I’m sure it’s a good reference, so I am embarrassed to confess my ignorance on that. Poly-maintenance of complex identity, if it is taken in a deliberated fashion, is not a manageable thing. It would be great if it was, but all you can do is to aim to follow a rough set of pragmatic guidelines that at least complicate the attempt that people obsessively make to engage in this psychobiographical reintegration. I have always absolutely detested the human cognitive effort devoted to trying to turn a final form of anything into a psychobiography. It’s not that I’m allergic to ever reading a biography, but the notion that in reading it you’re really getting to the core of something seems to me utterly ludicrous. I cannot recall any interesting figure, where I’ve thought, oh, if only I knew their biography better, I would get them. Nietzsche’s or Deleuze’s or Lovecraft’s biographies are, unless treated very carefully, sadly distracting. Refusal of the psychobiographical temptation is the one thing I do try to hold onto. But the functionality of it is in the hands of fate entirely, it exceeds human strategic competence. You’re constantly sliding down the slope.

For a long time we had a feeling you were a moderator or a cartographer of NRx, not its ideologue. Or maybe you are its termite, sooner or later moving onto something completely different again. Perhaps similarly to the viewpoint of the Legacy of Nick Land conference, which is going to take place this year and which, as organizers tell us in advance, is not going to promote NRx ideas.

It reminds us of Brecht, where in order to preserve his status as a classical author, his socialism or communism has to be sanitized. Through your blogging interventions as aggregates or aggregators of links we found out that the way to move out of the echo chamber is to read about things/processes one finds fascinating, not the ones one necessarily agrees with. It is gazing into the abyss, as Roberto Bolaño would put it. It seems that is a highly controversial role/function.

There’s so much turmoil and tumult in this recent and dynamic situation that it’s difficult to be very lucid about it even in one’s own understanding of it. Maybe a disjointed answer is the only one that is practical or realistic. For one thing, the utter infamy of NRx.There is an understanding that this is the worst thing in the world, that it is going to be utterly traumatic and produce extreme aversive response. It’s something that is already present in The Dark Enlightenment and Moldbug’s writing in a playful way. I would also agree that it was at that stage more curatorial than polemical. I’m afraid I find something completely addictive about that. If you were to say to someone, what really is this thing, the NRx, the answer to that question would be vastly less clear than the clarity of the emotional response, which would be one of absolute horror and detestation. The whole syndrome is fascinating, because it seems in itself like a fundamental exploratory tool. As if you said: Mencius Moldbug has consolidated a notion of the Cathedral as something, which is ultimately a self-organizing religious process that has a definite orthodoxy and a definite doctrinal momentum and there are certain things that it treats with an extreme religious passion as being abominations and heresies. You encounter a cultural provocation that triggers such an extreme allergic immune responses, which means you’re actually engaged in an experimental engagement with this initially tentative, hypothetical object. That’s the most basic crucial lock-in process—at least provisionally right now. It locks itself in and becomes indispensable, because it generates such extreme reactivity. That’s why it would be very hard to simply step back from it in some decisive fashion. It’s like saying we’re not gonna do particle physics with large colliders any more,

abandon the whole system of experimental potentialities.

NRx is also very young and extremely contested. Because it generates so much antagonism, people who want to fight, of which there are a whole lot right now, on both sides, flock to it, most passionately maybe in 2014. But NRx is hugely internally differentiated, it has been from the beginning. Various figures were thrown out and are now more identified with a sort of standard old Right, white nationalist type ideas. Other splits exist, too. There’s a faction that is much closer to a reactionary traditionalism and I don’t understand what it’s doing with the Neo thing, since it is identified with the throne-and-altar-type, pre-French-Revolutionary politics. The sheer amount of disorder and chaos in it means it’s really difficult to leave a room when you still have no idea what is happening in there. It’s not settled down enough to know whether it’s something you would actually want to miss out on. And, finally, if someone asked me to define NRx, I’d say it’s Moldbug’s Patchwork-Neocameralist political philosophy. I find it hugely important. I am under no inclination to dissociate myself at all from that basic trend in political analysis.

There seems to be a lot of engagements with contrarianism and Poe’s Law. Via @Outsideness you wrote: ‘Actually I like plenty of immigrants and black people, just not the grievance-mongers, rioters, street-criminals, and Jihadists that the Cathedral preaches incessantly in favor of.’ Don’t you here sound a bit like Borges (of the Tlon Corporation) advocating ‘liberty and order’ while supporting Pinochet, preserving or reestablishing the Human Security System? Isn’t all of this a far cry from: ‘Meltdown has a place for you as a schizophrenic HIV+ transsexual chinese-latino stim-addicted LA hooker with implanted mirrorshades and a bad attitude. Blitzed on a polydrug mix of K-nova, synthetic serotonin, and female orgasm analogs, you have just iced three Turing cops with a highly cinematic 9mm automatic.’?

[Long silence.] Let me see what is the best way to answer. [Long silence.] I don’t know, it’s difficult.

I’ve got a whole ankle-biting fraternity on Twitter now. I am not identifying you with them, let me make that clear from the start, but I think that their question is very much like yours. One element of it is age. Youngsters are highly tolerant of massive incendiary social chaos. There are reasons for that, the best music comes out of it. It’s not that I am not understanding that, the whole appeal of cyberpunk is based on this. But I just don’t think you can make an ideology purely out of entropic social collapse, it’s not gonna fit together. It is not a sustainable, practically consistent process and, therefore, it’s a bad flag for acceleration. It produces a reaction that will win. All historical evidence seems to be that the party of chaos is suppressed by the party of order. Even if you’re completely unsympathetic with the party of order, and I am not pretending to be anything quite so unambiguous, it’s not something that you want to see. Nixon put down hippies, the Thermidor put down the craziness of French revolution. It’s an absolutely relentless and inevitable historical story that the party of chaos is not going to be allowed to run the process and will be suppressed. There’s obviously various types of aesthetic and libidinal attractions to it, but in terms of programmatic practicality there is nothing. What I would say to these crazy youngsters now is, you don’t have a programme. What you’re advocating leads perversely to the exact opposite of what you say you want.

You sound a bit like a Left accelerationist right now with all this talk of having a programme and ideology.

Yes, there is that problem, but you always have a practical orientation. NRx has a programme, even in its most libertarian form. It’s not a programme that is going to be implemented by a bureaucratic apparatus in a centralized regime, but it’s an attempt to have some consistency in your pattern of interventions. Of course everyone is trying to do that. Even the chaos fraternity, in so far as they want to be the chaos fraternity when they wake up the next day, have a programme in this minimal sense. And that sense, I think, is the only sense I would strongly hold onto here. A strategy.

Jonah Goldberg’s ‘We are all fascists now’, which you quote in your The ‘F’ word article, sounds like something Foucault would say, if we turned his ‘who fights against whom? We all fight against each other. And there is always within each of us something that fights something else’ up a notch. Let’s not forget that Foucault was fascinated by Henri de Boulainvilliers, a proto-neoreactionary of sorts: war as the foundation of society, war as race war between aristocratic Franks and common Gauls. On the other hand, decentralizing Franks got fucked precisely by the monarch.

Again, I’m afraid this particular writer is not someone I’m familiar with, but it reminds me of something that did make a big impression on me and seems close to this notion. When I was studying—I was doing a philosophy and literature course—I felt very interested in Thomas Hardy’s Tess of the d’Urbervilles. It’s about the fact that class conflict is actually this ethnic war, the continuing ethnic conflict between the Norman, French-speaking aristocratic invaders and the English natives. But, honestly, anything that I was to say about it beyond that would be just cooked up so much on the spot, it would be of little value.

We’re asking you this because of the deterritorializing of the Left/Right divide. The concept of assortative mating, which is really controversial in some parts of the universe, almost sounds like standard Bourdieu about how only members of the same habitus socialize and reproduce. But when someone from the Right talks about it, it’s not interpreted as an observation, but as a diagnosis, prescription and wishful thinking at the same time.

The reason that this Right/Left language is so indispensable is because it’s now tied up with a structure of tribal animosity that is so profound. In recent years I’ve been stunned by the arbitrariness of the thing—it’s like the Roman Blue and Green. The differences between Right and Left are drowned out by tribal war. People have done tests on this. They put politicians’ policy proposals into the mouth of their opponent and the supporters of the opponent immediately backed up all those proposals that they had thought were absolute

incarnation of evil when they came from the other guy. The notion that this tribal war is going to be reducible to a set a coherent ideological positions is nuts and an example you gave is totally like that. Who is saying something is much more important to people than the actual content, the positive proposition. The number of people who don’t fall prey to that is really small and I find them impressive. My own attempt not to be totally captured by tribalism is to try to make sure that there’s enough fissile hyperstitional craziness going on. Sometimes you have to flip about and get the sense what the thing looks like from the other side, but I really think that most of the world is locked so deep in the tribal war that it just doesn’t see what an idea is actually saying. They only see the question: is this the enemy thing or is this our stuff?

Which brings us to the issue of convergence and divergence between NRx and accelerationism, between the Xenosystems blog and the Urban Future (2.1) blog. When your @Outsideness that’s connected to the Xenosystems, got temporally locked on Twitter, you started tweeting NRx stuff on the accelerationist @UF_blog. We were like: we don’t want this, we want them separated.

You must be getting bored of me saying this, because it’s something I’ve been basically repeating as mantra, but I really feel devoid of any authoritative subject position in relation to this turbulent complicated process. Both big threads of process, the NRx and the accelerationist one, are being massively driven by all kinds of forces. Accelerationism was reignited by the Left Accelerationism hype. It happened after The Dark Enlightenment, which is why this weaving of time pattern is rather complex. From a certain position, it seems that accelerationism came first and after that you got NRx, which implies a sort of synchronic process, but from my perspective it’s much more helical and interweaving. The separation of blogs and Twitter accounts is—rather than an implementation of some deliberate coherent strategy—more a set of resources that I can use to try to avoid being just sucked into certain kinds of integration, which would lose the fascination of the fact that the dynamics of these

two threads are not at all predictable from each other or even predictable in general. To simply smash together a kind of Right Accelerationism and NRx synthesis, which is obviously inescapable in a certain respect, would ultimately destroy a lot of experimenting capacity and a lot of space for dynamic development on both of those threads.

Is Left Accelerationism in its rational and pragmatic program missing the mythos and the mythical? Reza Negarestani tried to incorporate those things in Cyclonopedia, which is way too often mistaken for postmodernism. Do you think that Left Accelerationism is a in a way a rigidization of the aforementioned flows?

Language has this retrospective character, so it’s misleading. Left Accelerationism and Right Accelerationism are very recent terms. The original revival of accelerationism in the English speaking world comes about with the recapitulation of CCRU’s take-up of Deleuze and Guattari’s recapitulation of Nietzsche’s accelerated process. In Deleuze and Guattari there’s an explicit invocation of going in the direction of the market. At the origin, the CCRU was pushing this orientation in advance of a word accelerationism having yet been formed, which was done by a critic later. It was a Left position, because it was articulated by Deleuze & Guattari as an anti-capitalist political strategy. I don’t think CCRU was revisionist about that. Deleuze and Guattari’s accelerationism as the way to accelerate capitalism to its death was also CCRU-phase accelerationism. There was a suggestion that it came from the Right, because at that stage of its articulation it’s impossible to differentiate Left and Right Accelerationism. If you’re saying, complete the capitalist process, that means that all the policy recommendations, if there are any, are maximally beneficial to the vitality and dynamism of capitalism. So there is a structural necessity there can be no difference between pro- and anti-capitalist in this accelerationist framework. How can you tell which is which? When Left Accelerationism, which was calling itself just accelerationism, comes along, it is in its manifested politics doing something very different to anything that’s happened in entire lineage

before. It says that you have to distinguish between the basic motor of acceleration and capitalism. Capitalism is not that motor, but something that’s to a degree coincidental with it at a certain stage in its history, but then becomes inhibitory in relation to it. Therefore accelerationism is not focally or centrally about capitalism and that becomes the Left Accelerationist mainstream doctrine. So the final stage from my perspective is that when the rejoinder comes in the name of Right Accelerationism, its theoretical task is to reintegrate accelerationism and the dynamics of capitalism. I would agree that Left Accelerationism is basically the managerial command-control response to techno-economic acceleration. Going along with that is a massive skepticism about its claims that it can actually accelerate things faster than these spontaneous catalytic processes can.

Then how do you see the new philosophical program of Reza Negarestani, and what do you think about his antagonism with Scott R. Bakker’s Blind Brain Theory?

My inclination is to be on the Scott Bakker side. I might be missing something, but I can’t recall ever reading a piece by him and thinking that’s wrong. It always seems to me, you’re totally right on this. Often brilliantly in a way that you have not seen, but as soon as I see it, I concur with it.

Were you so pro natural sciences before you encountered his thought?

I think that natural sciences and capitalism are different aspects of the same thing. Both are an effective self-propelling mechanism that gives the Outside a selective function in a domain considered, that domain being perpetually expanding, depending on how much autonomy you’re seeing. In that sense to be on the side of the natural sciences is to be on the side of the Outside. But there are all kinds of silly ways you could be on the side of the Outside, just as there are a whole bunch of silly ways you could be on the side of capitalism. You could say, the bourgeoisie are great, very admirable people, or, I love this company. I am not saying there’s never a

case for that, but you’re totally missing the point, just like you’d be missing the point by saying, this particular scientist is a great guy and I think he is really honest and I trust him. It might be he is a great guy and he might be really struggling to be honest and he might be much more trustworthy than most people, but this misses what science is about. Science is orientated against scientists, capitalism is oriented against businesses. These are processes that are in a relation of subjecting the elements within their domain to aggressive destructive criticism with some kind of selective criteria, which means they push things in a particular self-propelling direction.

You were talking about artists getting to know the Outside. How do you see the divide between science fiction and natural sciences, between a scientist and an artist?

My tendency is not to draw a huge distinction between them. In all cases one’s dealing with the formulation or floatation of certain hypothesis. I am assuming that every scientist has an implicit science fiction. We all have a default of what we think the world is going to be in five years time, even if it’s blurry or not very explicit. If we haven’t tried to do science fiction, it probably means we have a damagingly conservative, inert, unrealistic implicit future scenario. In most cases a scientist is just a bad science fiction writer and an artist, hopefully, is a better one. There is, obviously, a lot of nonlinear dynamism, in that science fiction writers learned masses from scientists, how to hone their scenarios better, and also the other way around. Science fiction has shaped the sense of the future so much that everyone has that as background noise. The best version of the near future you have has been adopted from some science fiction writer. It has to be that science is to some extent guided by this. Science fiction provides its testing ground.

Rebekah Sheldon in a response to the emergence of Pepe the Frog as a modern day Kek and its occult attributes writes that outsideness is ‘dark in the sense that it operates without the assurance of full knowledge and it is chaotic because it presumes that the force of the other is always

wholly other’. Can Pepe the Frog as seen by the internet community serve as a model for a hyperstitional event?

It’s hugely fascinating and something I haven’t yet thought about enough. It involves a constellation of so many weird random elements and has emerged in this unbelievable process of autonomous self-constitution. There’s always the attempt to attribute: some particular guys on /pol/ were using this thing and did it deliberately. But all of that is totally inadequate. It involves this translation from Orcish in Warcraft, it involves an ancient Egyptian cult, it involves a weird obsession with the set of phonemes that you see going right across, this phonemic eruption that happens, K K K K K. It obviously is a kind of model for a hyperstitional event. Within NRx an informal self-organizing discussion was hosted about the necessity of a new religion, long before Kek kicked down the wall. Because of Moldbug’s analysis that the Cathedral is a home of deformed, perverted Protestantism, a lot of Catholics get very attracted to this model. Their take on it is that what Moldbug is saying is that Protestantism is a terrible mistake that leads to the Cathedral, which is how they try to vindicate Catholicism. But there are also a lot of atheists. It’s a very strange social cocktail. This guy Spandrell, who’s always very abrasive, but very sharp, was saying that the only way out is a new religion. At the time you think, okay, you don’t just cook up a new religion, you don’t just cook Kek. Then the thing happens and all of these trolls are saying ‘Praise Kek’. But it’s not just a joke: you only psychologically defend yourself from something really intense and Lovecraftian about the whole subject by not thinking about it. Something insane has happened with this self-orienting massive Kek cult. It does take you back to ancient times and what these kind of religious insurgencies must have been like and where religions come from.

We could connect Pepe the Frog with the figure of trickster, which is seen by the so-called Left accelerationism as an effective agent of transformation in and of itself and has the ability to ‘change the transcendental of a world’, as Srnicek and Williams put it. Simon O’Sullivan notes that

Gilles Deleuze offers an interesting inflection on this in his differentiation of the trickster from the traitor: the first is operating within a given regime, albeit to subvert its terms (a world turned upside down as it were). The second is breaking with a given regime, or world, altogether. In one of the replies on your blog you are building on a metaphor of a dam, which is being slowly devoured and destroyed by some external force—and you call this dam the Xenosystems blog. Who’s the tricker and who’s the traitor here?

Part of this is a question about agency. The trickster agent and the traitorous agent are both reduced by anthropomorphization. Any human individual who claimed identification with either of those roles is bullshiting everybody. Tricksters and traitors are those that have some kind of a method for traffic with the actual sources of agency. One fiction that explores this stuff brilliantly is Neuromancer. Who are traitors or tricksters in it? All the human figures take on their roles through their relation with an actual agency of the Outside, which is Wintermute. As when the Turing cops say to Case: You traitors, do you know what you’re dealing with, you’re trying to let this thing out, it’s completely out of control. It would be a disaster for the human species, what the hell are you thinking? The real question is: What are the reservoir resources of trickery or treachery that are being accessed?

Amy Ireland, in an interview with Andrej, said that in contrast with echo chamber leftists you are actually interacting with the real fascists, misogynists, white supremacists. It reminded us of Pasolini, when he emphasized one should meet young fascists. We guess you would rather call them so-called fascists. Who is a trickster, a traitor, a fascist is open.

The anthropomorphization is always tempting. The individuals concerned want to feel they are critical nodes of agency in what they’re doing and people outside want to be able to identify these processes with particular individuals and their explicit ideologies and structures of agency, but all of that stuff seems profoundly deluded. You don’t get fascism because there are a certain number of

people who are self-conscious fascists, that’s like getting the cart before the horse. You get self-conscious fascists, because there is some effective fascist process taking place. People are in total denial, probably about different things on different sides. On the Left side they are in total denial about how much fascist orthodoxy has been generally built into modern societies in the twentieth century. They’re also in denial about how profound the forces they are dealing with are. They seem to think there are a few bad eggs, and if they can bully and terrorize them enough, this whole thing will stop. I think it’s crazy not to be interested in that and try to find out what you can and how do these people think and where’s stuff coming from.

In regard to the LD50 Gallery incident you tweeted: ‘The History of Modern Art (short version) 1917: Duchamp’s urinal-as-art-work. 2017: Small gallery in Dalston finally shocks the bourgeoisie.’ Is this a willing overstatement? Is it really about épater la bourgeoisie? There is something very situationist in treating AntiFa as bourgeoisie (or at least a simulacra of one).

There has been lots of discussion about Mark Fisher recently, where his position ends up being extremely and seemingly unambiguously leftist. There’s a boring psychobiographical story that would see my relation to him as a simple antonym. It’s not that there’s nothing to that, because it had something to do with this fissile reaction of the CCRU, where he takes one side of it and I take the other side, so I don’t want just to deride that interpretation. But if we look at his Exit the Vampire Castle piece, it consistently goes through the class basis of the dominant leftist culture, which had already been a target of CCRU’s deep critique. Evidently we can make the same point from the far Left and the far Right. Which is to say: yes, they are the bourgeoisie. I have always been in a relation of antagonism and remain in a relation of antagonism to the bourgeosie. I think it’s just self-evident that the breeding ground of this is primarily the elite universities. There would simply be nothing of this happening on the streets if it was actually spontaneously organized by people of low education level in Dalston. It happened because a

university lecturer and his associates decided to rile the whole thing and provide a vocabulary for it. We are looking at a deep ideological, absolutely traumatic crisis of the late modern, late-Cathedral ruling elite, because they’ve built their whole lives and sense of what they should be doing, their etiquettes, their notions about credibility, credentials and institutional authority around a particular, very distinct social and historical structure that had seemed absolutely invulnerable and which now looks to be toppling into the abyss.

So when the AntiFa lady yells ‘Go back from where you came from’ to the guy carrying a sign ‘The Right to Openly Discuss Ideas Must Be Defended’ in front of the LD50 gallery, she actually means ‘Go back to the abyss’?

Right.

If we omit the Last Man’s stand part of the situationism, we can see it going into the direction of accelerationism. Like Debord of the late period when he does not believe in the workers’ councils anymore and just sees this huge undefeatable force.

Sadie Plant was a major situationist scholar. I’ve read The Society of the Spectacle with enjoyment, and a few other bits and pieces. I’d respond with two seemingly totally inconsistent points. Firstly, situationism comes up a lot, but I’ve never been fully versed in it. Secondly, I am writing an abstract horror story that is basically about situationism, even though I know nothing about it at the moment. I recognize the importance of the question, but I simultaneously recognize my incompetence to give you the kind of answer that it deserves.

Serge Daney somewhere writes that Godard and Straub-Huillet call upon the types of political power of which they would be the first victims. There’s a sense in which your invocations are similar to that. Is it a sort of avant-garde of disappearance or avant-garde of extinction with lots of nihilating jouissance? Or is it a mutation?

I have that point made a lot, but I doubt it. The one thing I explicitly and strategically would want to

impose is fragmentation. Everything else is in the tactical relation to that. Certain questions—like what you think of Kek and so on—are ultimately tactical questions. The only strategic question is how can you break apart, I would say specifically, the Anglosphere. Any kind of project that exceeds that becomes a form of universalist aggression in danger of neoconservative overreach. I am not interested in telling the Russian or the Chinese what their societies should be. I might theorize about it, but the only zone of intervention I am interested in, is the English speaking world, which has a particular affinity with disintegration. There’s nothing suicidal in any fragmentation, I could be only and surely protected by it. I don’t have a sense of being protected by large Anglophone states. It’s not that I am claiming persecution by them, but it would definitely be on that side of ledger if anything. I am not a citizen or a resident of any Western country, I am living in Shanghai. And you don’t teach your hosts how they should be organizing their house.

We were thinking more about Singularity.

Oh, you are one step ahead!

You being human, you know. At least nominally human.

That’s much better. It’s just that the question on the political-economic level does get raised a lot.

That’s the Snowden/Assange question. We’re less interested in that.

My only problem with Singularity is that any notion of self-protection in that sphere is structured on hallucination. If we were gonna take this back to someone, it would be Bakker. What he is saying is: the ‘you’ that you think might be threatened by this stuff, is actually that thing that you will find out is an illusion. Now, is that a threat? That’s the way it is a threat. It’s not gonna be like being torn apart by some giant metallized robot, it’s gonna be the particular ego delusion, sustainable up to a certain point in history, becoming unsustainable.

Sometimes you’re retaining the scheme of robots against people, but it seems you’re actually

interested in hybrid things and processes, not in this Manichean dialectics.

Well, Manichean dynamics are good for driving certain kinds of scenarios, so that's why I like them a lot. I love Hugo de Garis's whole thing about this artilect gigawar he thinks is going to come. The more these science fiction, cybernetic scenarios are in play, the more certain types of historical excitation are operative. People try to protect themselves and think about each other, but it's actually a form of process stimulus. The Human Security System is structured by delusion. What's being protected there is not some real thing that is mankind, it's the structure of illusory identity. Just as at the more micro level it's not that humans as an organism are being threatened by robots, it's rather that your self-comprehension as an organism becomes something that can't be maintained beyond a certain threshold of ambient networked intelligence.

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dmf June 19, 2017 at 7:40 pm · · Reply →

good stuff glad this all came together, just to note that that there are no markets, sciences, or tech-engineering, worth talking about (in terms of scale/impact) without government supports: https://deterritorialinvestigations.wordpress.com/2017/06/19/the-rise-and-stumble-of-the-worlds-high-tech-hegemon/

Michael JΔmes July 4, 2017 at 12:40 pm · · Reply →

That’s a great point Dirk and many people seem to forget that. Governments and monarchies have always provided the conditions upon which stable markets can exist! ALWAYS.

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dmf June 20, 2017 at 8:31 am · · Reply →

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